THE STORIES BEHIND THE MUSIC

1960s

THE GREATEST HITS!

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THE STORIES BEHIND THE MUSIC

1960s

THE GREATEST HITS!

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INTRODUCTION

LISTEN, DO YOU WANT TO KNOW A SECRET?

JUST BECAUSE YOU KNOW A SONG BY HEART DOESN'T MEAN YOU KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT IT

Rock and pop music were not invented in the 1960s—but it's certainly the era most remembered by fans of all ages for producing the largest collection of iconic songs. It's little wonder the music of the decade has had such a great impact. Talented young artists from every walk of life left their mark on practically every genre—from rock to folk, soul to country, blues to psychedelic—and every hybrid blend in between. This flood of creativity was amplified by eager listeners around the world who couldn't wait to hear what was coming next.

And even though the '60s were by no means a simple time, the ways we enjoyed music were far less complicated and much more accessible: Radio was booming, record players were spinning and opportunities to see your favorite artists perform live were plentiful and affordable.

Maybe that's why so many of us can't help but sing along whenever we hear these songs. We know all the words because '60s music is the soundtrack to our lives, even if you were very young—or not yet born—when the records were first released.

But cherished recordings only scratch the surface. In many instances, the stories behind this music are just as fascinating, funny and unforgettable as the songs themselves. Here are some of those stories. Once you know them, it will only make you love these '60s classics even more.

CHAPTER 1

NOW THAT MAKES TOTAL SENSE

TRUTH IS OFTEN STRANGER THAN FICTION

Sometimes, the stories behind some of our most beloved hits are even more interesting than the songs themselves.

* * *

CHAPTER 1

“IN-A-GADDA-DA-VIDA”

IRON BUTTERFLY, 1968

Rock history remembers “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida” as one of the first heavy metal songs. As released on the album of the same name, it runs 17 minutes 5 seconds, filling the album’s entire second side. Hypnotic, fantastically fuzzy and with a drum solo that stretches to the outskirts of eternity, it sounds like the whole of the late ’60s experience encapsulated in one recording.

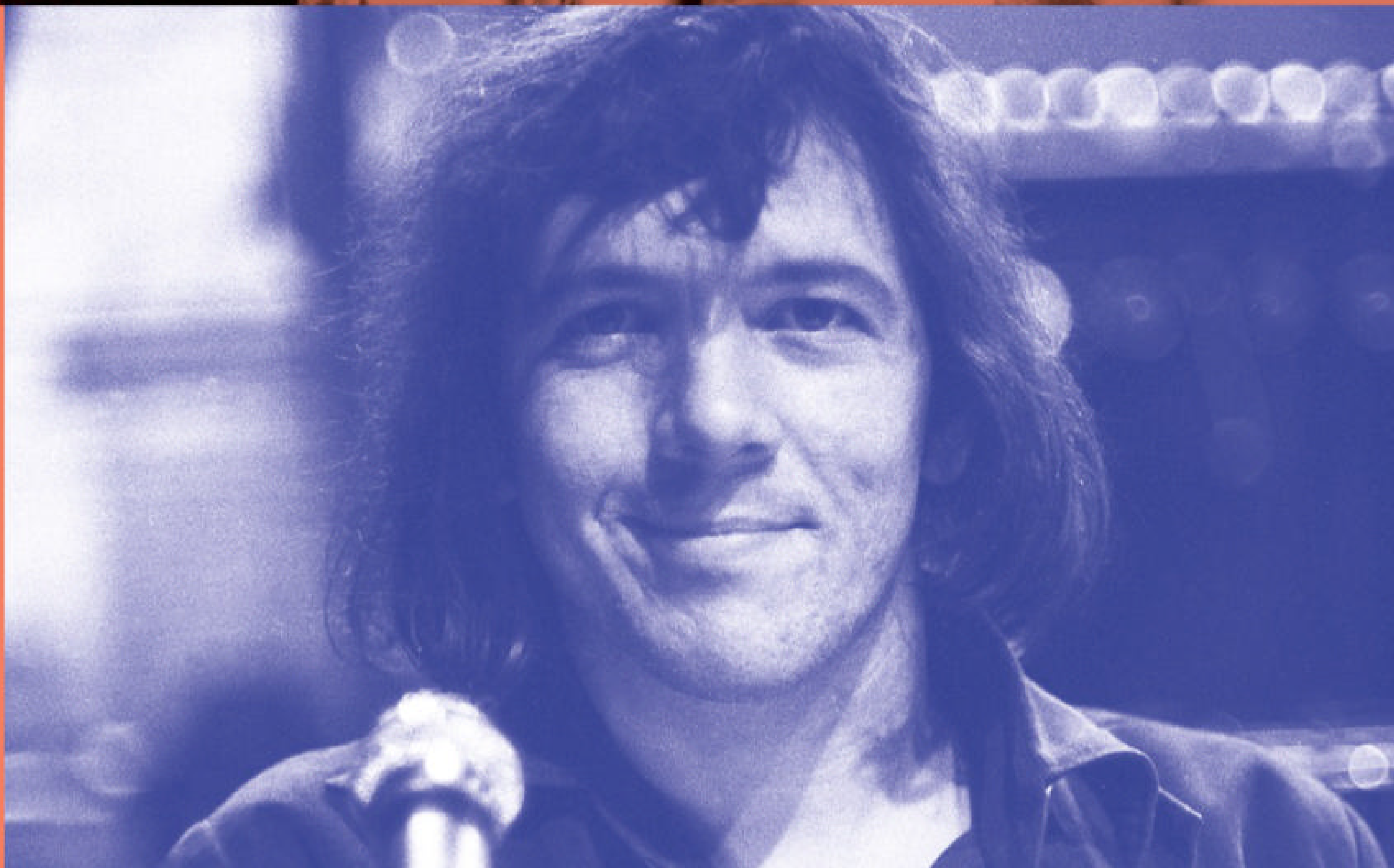
The song was written by Doug Ingle, Iron Butterfly’s lead vocalist and organist. Ingle, the son of a Nebraska church organist, sang in a baritone reminiscent of the Doors’ Jim Morrison. According to an interview with band drummer Ron Bushy, Ingle first shared his most iconic song with Bushy after the latter returned from work making pizzas on Sunset Boulevard. Ingle was excited about his slow “country ballad” and was drunk on a gallon of Red Mountain wine, which made the lyric “in the Garden of Eden” sound unintelligible. Nonetheless, Bushy liked what he heard and wrote the lyrics down on a napkin under the title “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida,” because that was the best he could make out as Ingle sang. Ingle sobered up, but the meaningless phonetics stuck.

The recorded jam itself was actually just a soundcheck for engineer Don Casale as Iron Butterfly waited for producer Jim Hilton to arrive at the studio. Casale and the band agreed there was no need for a second take—even though the song was only intended to run 1 minute 30 seconds. (For the record, there are only 30 different words in the full 17:05 take.... And Bushy’s “endless” drum solo lasts 2:30.)

★

PSYCHEDELIC ROCK
Iron Butterfly (above, circa 1970) released “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida” in the summer of 1968.

MISUNDERSTOOD
Singer and keyboardist Doug Ingle (right) was actually singing “in the Garden of Eden,” but his unintelligible lyrics helped spark the band’s signature song.



CHAPTER 1

“PINBALL WIZARD”

THE WHO, 1969

Critic Nik Cohn hailed the Who’s *Tommy*—an ambitious rock opera about a deaf, dumb and blind kid who...well, you know—as “rock’s first formal masterpiece.”

It is fashionable to believe that such platitudes would be meaningless to an avant-garde artist like Pete Townshend. But in truth, the Who’s co-founder, guitarist and leader really wanted Cohn to like *Tommy*. He wanted that a lot—so much so that he stacked the deck.

The rock opera concept was always a risky idea, and it only existed in Townshend’s head. Even his bandmates didn’t know how the story would go until Pete revealed it to them, one song at a time. Eventually, the album was laid out in a rough mix—but minus the song “Pinball Wizard.” “Pinball” wasn’t in Townshend’s mind at all when he played the rough version of the album for Cohn to get some feedback.

Cohn’s initial reaction was that something was missing—a hit. That’s when Townshend pulled out the idea of including “Pinball Wizard,” which he had written independently of *Tommy*, partly because he knew Cohn loved pinball.

“I tell a kind of a tall story, which is that I wrote ‘Pinball Wizard’ in order to get a good review from a friend of mine called Nik Cohn,” Townshend revealed to Uncle Joe Benson on the radio show *Ultimate Classic Rock Nights*. “But I’d already written ‘Pinball Wizard’ for Nik Cohn; I just hadn’t played it to him. He came to hear the *Tommy* recordings and he was quite impressed. I said to him later in private, ‘What do you think?’ He said, ‘I don’t hear a hit.... Pete, you say this is a collection of singles—it’s a collection of singles OK, but I don’t hear a hit single,’.... I said, ‘What about if I swing in ‘Pinball Wizard?’ That meant then that my deaf, dumb and blind boy had to become a pinball player—which meant going back into the piece and changing a lot of the lyrics!”

WE LOVE YOU
TOMMY FOR PINBALL KING
SCORE MORE! TOMMY
TOMMY
Tommy for table KING
CHAMP

★

PINBALL WIZ
The Who’s rock opera, *Tommy*, mostly written by Pete Townshend (above, top), was hailed as “rock’s first formal masterpiece” by Nik Cohn in 1970.

ALL-STAR CAST
Rocker Elton John (above) appeared as the Pinball Wizard in the 1975 film version of *Tommy*.

AMERICAN BEATLE
SInger-songwriter Harry Nilsson (left) recorded "One" for his 1967 LP, *Aerial Ballet.*

COVER STARS
Three Dog Night (below) introduced audiences to songwriters by covering their songs, including Nilsson's "One" and Randy Newman's "Mama Told Me (Not To Come)"—making them hits.

"ONE"

THREE DOG NIGHT, 1969

The best-known version of "One" was released by Three Dog Night in 1969 and peaked at No. 5 on the Billboard Hot 100. One year earlier, the song was first included on the album *Aerial Ballet* by Harry Nilsson—a former computer programmer turned songwriter turned performer who became famous for such hits as "Everybody's Talkin'," "Without You," and "Coconut"—and for being John Lennon's drinking buddy during his "lost weekend" in Los Angeles in the 1970s.

With lyrics like "one is the loneliest number that you'll ever do" and "two can be as bad as one, it's the loneliest number since the number one," it's easy to think of "One" as a song about a romantic relationship gone wrong. And, as presented, that's exactly what it's meant to bring to mind.

But the true inspiration for "One" wasn't like that at all—it wasn't sad and it was actually pretty common for anyone who remembers a time before cellphones. Harry Nilsson went to call a friend on a good old-fashioned landline and got a busy signal. Now antiquated in the age of digital dialing, the busy signal was a simple pulsating "beep-beep-beep"—the exact sound that Nilsson mimicked on piano as the opening of "One."

In addition to the version by Three Dog Night, the song was also covered by John Farnham in 1969 and by Aimee Mann, whose version was featured in the 1999 movie *Magnolia*, starring Tom Cruise.

CHAPTER 1

"MONY MONY"

TOMMY JAMES AND THE SHONDELLS, 1968

Just like an expert mechanic can build—and rebuild—cars, Tommy James understood what was going on under the hood of a hit '60s pop song. In 1964, he emerged from his native Michigan with a cover of "Hanky Panky" that would become a radio hit in Pittsburgh one year later and make him a national star. In 1967, he had another hit with "I Think We're Alone Now"—a song written by Ritchie Cordell that was so catchy it worked forwards and backwards (the song "Mirage" was a happy accident, the result of "I Think We're Alone Now" being fed into a tape machine the wrong way and played backwards to create a new chord progression, that Cordell matched with new lyrics).

In the case of "Mony Mony," James collaborated with a group that included Cordell, Bo Gentry and Bobby Bloom ("Montego Bay") to produce a radio-friendly groove that James just knew would be a hit—if he could only come up with the right name for it.

"I had the track done before I had a title," he told *Hitch* magazine in 1995. "I wanted something catchy like 'Sloopy' or 'Bony Maroney,' but everything sounded so stupid. So Ritchie Cordell and I were writing it in New York City, and we were about to throw in the towel when I went out onto the terrace, looked up and saw the Mutual of New York building (which has its initials illuminated in red at its top). I said, 'That's gotta be it! Ritchie, come here, you've gotta see this!'.... I've always thought that if I had looked the other way, it might have been called 'Hotel Taft.'"

★

CATCHY GROOVE
Tommy James (above, top) in a recording studio, circa 1968. While creating "Mony, Mony," James was looking for a radio-friendly earworm.

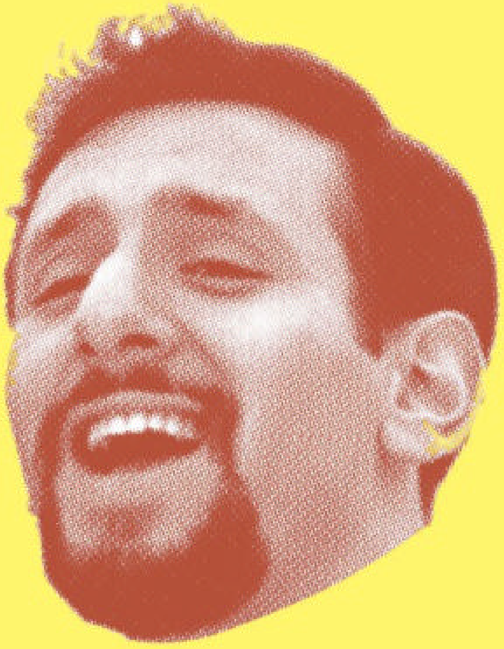
RADIO HITS
Ritchie Cordell (above) found success as the writer for Tommy James and the Shondell's "I Think We're Alone Now" in 1967.

CHAPTER 2

NOT ABOUT DRUGS!

REALLY. THESE SONGS HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH DRUGS. SERIOUSLY.

It’s hard to believe that the songs that seem the most guilty of glorifying drug use were actually, truly written with innocence.



* * *

"PUFF THE MAGIC DRAGON"

PETER, PAUL AND MARY, 1963

There's no doubt that unlocking the "mysteries" of rock lyrics can be a mind-blowing pastime, especially for those in a reality-expanding altered state. But the evidence that "Puff the Magic Dragon" is all about marijuana wasn't hatched in a dorm room. It all started in the editorial offices of *Newsweek* magazine in 1964.

In an article about hidden messages in pop songs—likely intended not to excite young listeners but worry their parents—the news magazine spelled out how "Jackie Paper" was a reference to rolling joints, "dragon" was meant to suggest taking a "drag on" a joint and "puff" was about puffing. Like, puffing a joint... Get it?

Two people who didn't get it were PP&M's Peter Yarrow and his buddy, Lenny Lipton. In the late 1950s, Yarrow and Lipton were college roommates at Cornell. It was exam time, and Lipton was both anxious and homesick—so he typed some lines of a would-be poem about the end of childhood.

Yarrow found the lines in the typewriter, fleshed them out and turned them into song lyrics. Over the years, Yarrow has insisted that the song he wrote was not about marijuana. Lipton has also said his original poem wasn't about drugs—at all. "I can tell you that at Cornell in 1959, no one smoked grass," Lipton has said. "I find the fact that people interpret it as a drug song annoying. It would be insidious to propagandize about drugs in a song for little kids."

HIDDEN MEANING
While many found a more illicit meaning to "Puff the Magic Dragon," that was news to the folk singers in Peter, Paul and Mary (below).

PURE INNOCENCE
American-Canadian band Steppenwolf (left) wrote "Magic Carpet Ride" about the joy found in listening to music on a hi-fi stereo.

JUST SAY NO
Paul Revere & the Raiders (below) had a hit with the anti-drug song "Kicks," originally written by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil for the Animals before Eric Burdon turned it down.

"MAGIC CARPET RIDE"

STEPPENWOLF, 1968

In 1966, Paul Revere & the Raiders released an anti-drug song called "Kicks." The first line set the scene: "Girl, you thought you found the answer on that magic carpet ride last night." The second line drove home the message: "But when you wake up in the mornin' the world still gets you uptight."

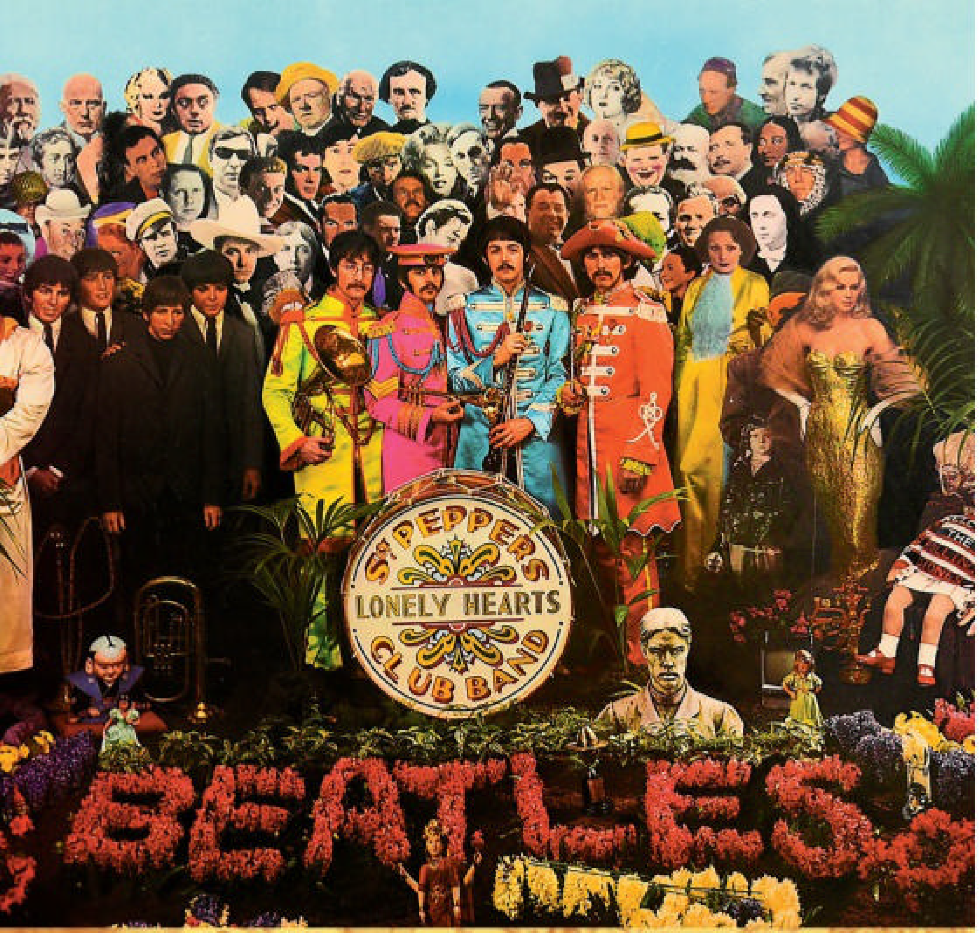
Two years later, the American-Canadian band Steppenwolf released their own song with a much-more positive outlook on magic carpet rides—and it would have been natural to interpret this one as being pro drugs given the reference.

Only, singer John Kay—who wrote the lyrics around a groovy riff from bass player Rushton Moreve—wasn't thinking about drugs at all. He was really extolling the joys of falling asleep while listening to an awesome hi-fi stereo. It's all spelled out in the opening verse:

I like to dream, yes, yes
Right between the sound machine
On a cloud of sound I drift in the night
Any place it goes is right
Goes far, flies near
To the stars away from here

Yes, the Steppenwolf song sounded trippy. And, yes, the band also had a hit with "Born To Be Wild." But this song? Pure innocence for audiophiles everywhere.

with 16
evere and the Raiders



CHAPTER 2

“LUCY IN THE SKY WITH DIAMONDS”

THE BEATLES, 1967

In spring 1965, John Lennon and George Harrison—along with their wives Cynthia Lennon and Pattie Boyd—tried LSD for the first time, having been slipped the hallucinogenic drug on sugar cubes in their coffee after a dinner party with their dentist. At first, they were upset—Lennon in particular. Then, they were turned on, soon trying to convince Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr that they should try it, too.

Starr obliged. McCartney was reluctant, so Lennon tried to persuade him by saying that after the experience, you’re “never the same again.” McCartney didn’t like the sound of that, but eventually he did take a trip—and admitted so in an interview with *Life* magazine in June 1967. Now drugs and the Beatles were a fashionable ’60s trend.

Just a few weeks prior, the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which included the psychedelic song “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds,” primarily written by Lennon. As a gift to the band’s fans, the sleeve for *Sgt. Pepper* included the lyrics to all of the album’s songs—a practice that was years away from being common.

Some fans decided that “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds” was a reference to LSD—a claim that Lennon denied.

The song’s association with drugs remains a subject of debate among fans. But one story about its origins has never been denied: John’s oldest son, Julian, had a classmate named Lucy O’Donnell. In a 1975 interview, Lennon explained that “Julian came in one day with a picture about a school friend of his named Lucy. He had sketched in some stars in the sky and called it ‘Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds.’” Julian Lennon confirmed this explanation in 2009 when his friend Lucy died of complications from Lupus.

★

INNOVATORS
The Beatles (above, top and right) released *Sgt. Pepper* in 1967 and printed the lyrics to all the album’s songs on the back cover, marking the first time this was ever done.

THE REAL LUCY
Julian Lennon (above, left) showed his father, John, a drawing he made of his schoolmate he titled “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds,” which inspired the song.

SGT. PEPPER'S
LONELY HEARTS
CLUB BAND
BEATLES

BEING COOL
Donovan's hit song "Mellow Yellow" was released in the U.S. in 1966.

"MELLOW YELLOW"

DONOVAN, 1966

Donovan Leitch was a Scottish-born folk singer and psychedelic man about town in Swinging London. Among his close friends were the Beatles—which meant Donovan was a made man in the pop-culture scene. When Donovan thought something was hip, it became so, and kids in the U.K. and the U.S. looked to his clothes, his interests and his music for clues on how to be ahead of the times.

Did everyone always understand what Donovan was talking about? No...but that was part of the allure. Anyone could be obvious. Donovan was hip. And, in the '60s, that came with an assumption that he was into drug culture—which he was, openly. In fact, Donovan holds the distinction of being the first rock star busted by the London drug squad, which would go on to cause trouble for the Beatles, the Stones and others.

When "Mellow Yellow" was released, it became a huge hit in the U.S., peaking at No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100. Some interpreted the lyrics as an endorsement to dry out banana peels and smoke the skins. Why? To get high, man. Real high. (In 1967, the *Berkeley Barb* further propagated the belief that banana peels were a hallucinogen that could easily be attained at the local supermarket—often on sale!)

The whole trend was debunked in November 1967 when researchers at New York University conducted a study that found nothing in banana peels that could produce an intoxicating state. For those who swore it worked, it was all in their mind.

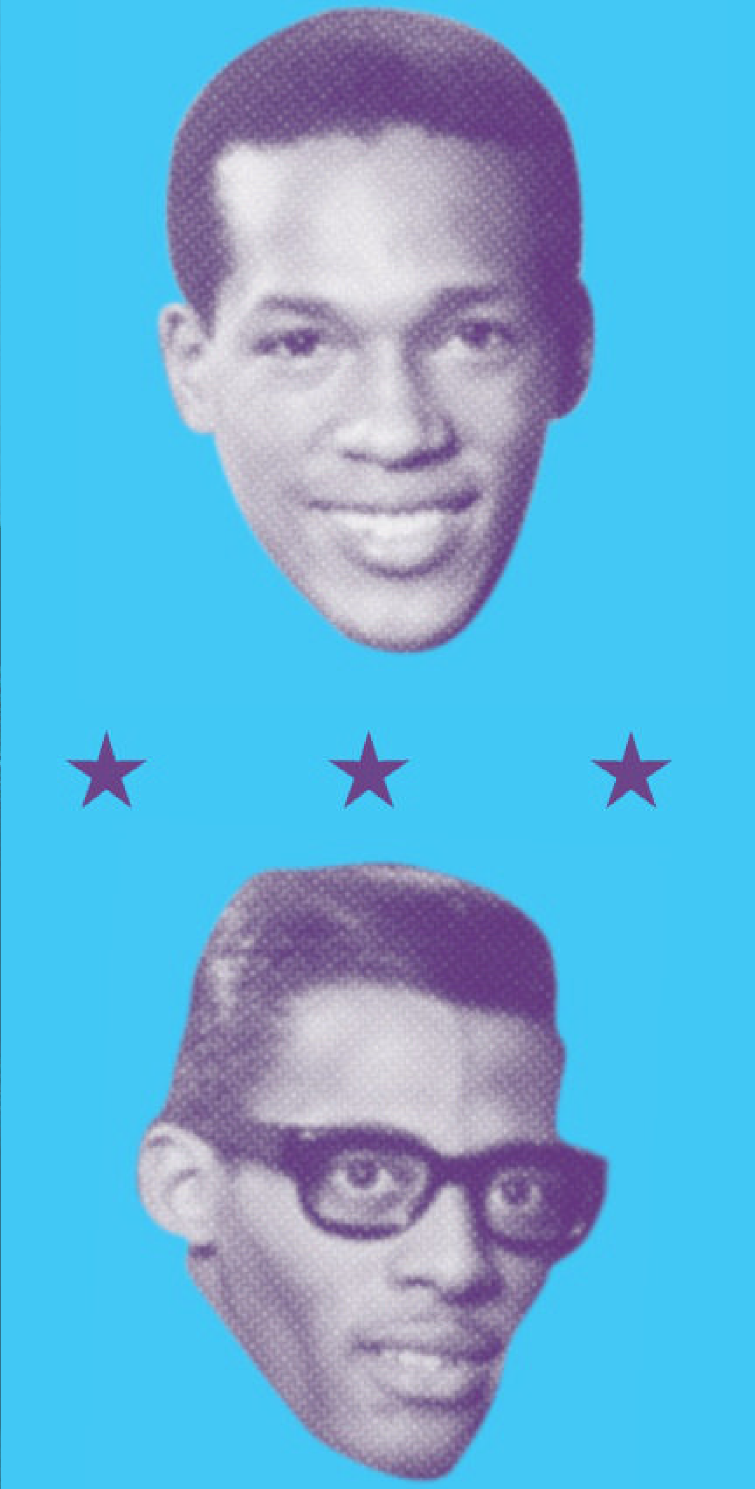
Was Donovan a believer? No. He later admitted that the "electrical banana" referenced in his hit song was about the game-changing promise of vibrators for women—and being "mellow yellow" just meant being cool. If you know, you know.

CHAPTER 3

SO SAD!

THESE STORIES ARE ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU CRY

These tearjerkers have backstories that will make your tears flow even harder.



“I WISH IT WOULD RAIN” 1967 AND “I COULD NEVER LOVE ANOTHER (AFTER LOVING YOU)” 1968

THE TEMPTATIONS, 1967-68

The Temps did some great songs about pursuing love—and losing it. Their label, Motown, also did a great job of turning hit-making into an industrialized, assembly-line pursuit.

Rodger Penzabene was a Motown songwriter for a short period of time, but he made the most of it. Growing up in Detroit, his childhood friend and neighbor was Cornelius Grant, who went on to become the Temptations’ musical director.

Penzabene landed a job of his own at Motown. There, he wrote songs that were recorded by Gladys Knight & the Pips, Marvin Gaye and the Temptations. Two of his biggest hits for the Temps were “I Could Never Love Another (After Loving You)” and “I Wish It Would Rain”—both of which were inspired by his deeply emotional feelings for his wife, Helga Penzabene, who went on to become a singer herself.

Rodger and Helga met in high school and married young. Perhaps too young as Helga strayed, leaving Rodger in deep despair that he channeled into his lyrics. In “I Wish It Would Rain,” he says, “People, this hurt I feel inside / Words, they could never explain / I just wish it would rain.” In “I Could Never Love Another (After Loving You)” he expresses himself even more succinctly: “You’ve taken away my reason for livin’.”

On New Year’s Eve, 1967, Rodger Penzabene committed suicide just a week after “I Could Never Love Another” was released as a single. Helga has gone on the record to say that her first husband did not kill himself over her. No one will ever know what other songs he might have written. He was 22 years old.

DEEP EMOTIONS
Rodger Penzabene penned deeply personal songs for Motown greats like Marvin Gaye and the Temptations (above and right).

LOVE TRIANGLE
“I Could Never Love Another (After Loving You)” and “I Wish It Would Rain” speak of the heartbreak of loving someone who has been unfaithful.

HARMONY
The Bee Gees (left) are most known for their string of disco singles in the ’70s.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY
“To Love Somebody” was meant for a soulful singer like Otis Redding (below). Sadly, Redding died before he had a chance to record it.

“TO LOVE SOMEBODY”

THE BEE GEES, 1967

The Bee Gees are best known for making America love (then hate through overexposure) disco in the 1970s, but the three-brother act from Britain by way of Australia was a group of prolific songwriters responsible for multiple hits recorded by other artists.

Manager Robert Stigwood navigated the Bee Gees’ career much like Brian Epstein had done for the Beatles. He personally asked Barry and Robin Gibb to write a soulful ballad, something that might be suitable for a singer like Otis Redding. Robin would later recall actually meeting Redding in New York City while the band was on tour. “Otis Redding said he loved our material and would Barry write him a song,” Robin is quoted as saying in David N. Meyer’s 2013 book, *The Bee Gees: The Biography*.

The song that resulted was “To Love Somebody.” Barry was particularly proud of the composition, telling Piers Morgan in 2017 that of everything he has ever written, it is the one song he would choose because of its “clear, emotional message.” Not surprisingly, the Bee Gees recorded their own version in April 1967, which was included in the band’s debut album, *Bee Gees’ 1st*.

Offering the song to Redding to record was, apparently, also part of the plan. But it was not to be. On Dec. 10, 1967, Redding died in a plane crash while on tour. He was 26 years old. Other performers did go on to cover the song, including Janis Joplin, Nina Simone and Billy Corgan.

ICONIC TEAM
Bridge Over Troubled Water was the final studio LP released by Simon & Garfunkel in 1970.

CHAPTER 3

"THE BOXER"

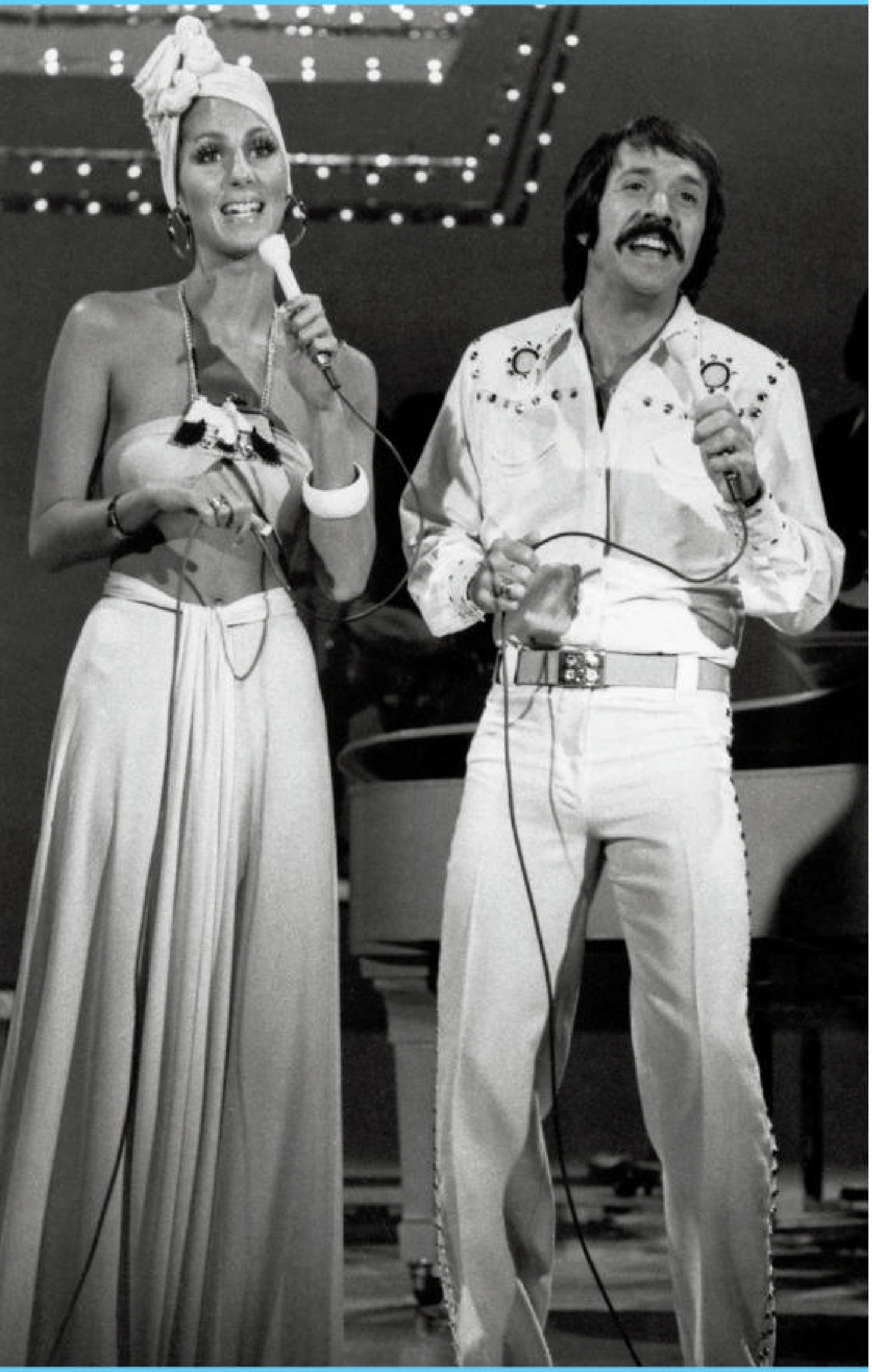
SIMON & GARFUNKEL, 1969

First released as a single on March 21, 1969, then included as part of the album *Bridge Over Troubled Water* in 1970, "The Boxer" is one of the most iconic songs ever written by Paul Simon—which is saying a lot for the two-time Rock & Roll Hall of Famer and the eighth-ranked songwriter of all time on *Rolling Stone*'s Top 100 list in 2015.

In a 1984 interview with *Playboy*, Simon revealed that the song was written to express his own feelings about himself and his career. In other words, "the boxer" is Paul Simon, which is pretty sad when you ponder lyrics like: "I am just a poor boy / Though my story's seldom told / I have squandered my resistance / For a pocketful of mumbles such are promises / All lies and jest / Still a man hears what he wants to hear / And disregards the rest..."

In this pity party set to music, Simon lays bare his own insecurities. "Everybody's beating me up, and I'm telling you now I'm going to go away if you don't stop," Simon explained in the *Playboy* interview. "For the first few years, it was just pure praise. It took two or three years for people to realize that we weren't strange creatures that emerged from England but just two guys from Queens who used to sing rock 'n' roll. And maybe we weren't real folkies at all! Maybe we weren't even hippies!"

Simon's self-doubt is punctuated by a line in the song that he never liked. As he explained to *Song-Talk* magazine in 1990: "I thought that 'lie la lie' was a failure of songwriting. I didn't have any words! Then people said it was 'lie,' but I didn't really mean that. That it was a lie. But...because people like that and they put enough meaning into it, and the rest of the song has enough power and emotion, I guess, to make it go, so it's all right. But for me, every time I sing that part, I'm a little embarrassed."



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TV TITANS
The Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour ran from 1971 until 1974 and each episode ended with the duo singing "I Got You Babe."

THEME SONG
Sonny & Cher's "I Got You Babe" spent three weeks at No. 1 and sold over 1 million copies.

CHAPTER 3

"I GOT YOU BABE"

SONNY & CHER, 1965

Sonny Bono lived a self-made American success story. Born in Detroit to Italian immigrants, then raised in California, Bono started his career as a songwriter before getting a break as a studio gofer for Phil Spector.

This experience put Sonny and his then-girlfriend—Cherilyn Sarkisian, whom everyone just called "Cher"—in proximity to a lot of big acts, as well as giving him insights into Spector's production style and access to studio time.

Sometimes, Cher sang backup on Spector songs, but Sonny thought he and Cher might have promise as a recording act on their own. As the young couple worked to establish their career, Sonny spent nights writing songs at a piano while Cher slept. Inspiration struck one evening when Sonny wrote a song about Cher herself and the life he hoped they might be building together.

"They say our love won't pay the rent / Before it's earned, our money's all been spent / I guess that's so, we don't have a pot / But at least I'm sure of all the things we got / Babe / I got you, babe"

Simple and sentimental, the song's point was Sonny didn't need anything else as long as he had Cher. Excited, he went to get her to hear the song. Her reaction was less than encouraging.

"Sonny woke me up in the middle of the night to come in where the piano was, in the living room, and sing it," Cher later recalled in an interview with *Billboard*. "I didn't like it and just said, 'OK, I'll sing it and then I'm going back to bed.'"

Like it or not, the single spent three weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100, sold more than a million copies and launched Sonny & Cher's career. In the 1970s, the couple starred in a hit TV variety program—closing the show every week with "I've Got You Babe"—and became one of America's favorite couples until their marriage ended in a very public divorce in 1975.

CHAPTER 4

IT WAS ALL A DREAM

INSPIRATION DOESN'T ALWAYS COME WHEN YOU'RE AWAKE

For artists, it's hard to know when a spark of inspiration will strike. And, famously for some, it may happen when they aren't even fully awake.

CHAPTER 4

“(I CAN’T GET NO) SATISFACTION”

THE ROLLING STONES, 1965

Keith Richards has lived quite a life—and it’s not surprising that he’s lost many of the details along the way. But, when it comes to the iconic riff of “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction,” the facts are crystal clear.

First off, he was sleeping. He might have been in Clearwater, Florida, during one of the Stones’ early U.S. tours. Or, he might have been at the London Hilton. It’s also possible he was in Chelsea.

Wherever he was, it was likely in the spring of 1965. That night, Richards suddenly woke up with a riff and a single lyric stuck in his head: “can’t get no satisfaction.” Half asleep, Richards committed it to a tape recorder so he wouldn’t lose it. The next morning, Keith played back the tape, which captured the catchy riff followed by the sound of snoring.

For a time, Richards thought he might have nicked it entirely from “Dancing in the Street,” by Martha and the Vandellas. Ultimately convinced that it was similar, but not identical, Keith then started to worry that it was all too basic, sounding a bit like a folk song.

“Keith didn’t like it much,” Mick Jagger recalled in 1968. “I don’t think he really listened to it properly. He was too close to it and just felt it was a silly kind of riff.”

Jagger contributed all the lyrics except the line “can’t get no satisfaction.” As for Keith, he did try, and try, and try, and try to warm up to the song—even playing the riff through a newfangled Gibson Fuzz Box. Richards didn’t like the distorted version much, either—but the rest of the Stones convinced him the sound was distinctive.

Released as the Stones’ first single in the U.S., the song was a smash—finding a home for itself on the Billboard Hot 100 chart for 14 weeks. “The record of the summer of ’65,” Richards reflected in his 2010 autobiography, *Life*. “I learned that lesson—sometimes you can overwork things. Not everything’s designed for your taste and your taste alone.”

★

DREAMY RIFF
In the spring of 1965, Keith Richards (above) awoke to a single lyric and riff that became the basis for one of the Stones’ biggest hits, “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction.”

THE HITMAKERS
The Stones’ Mick Jagger (from left), Brian Jones, Keith Richards, Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts pose for a portrait in 1964.

★

UNBELIEVABLE ORIGIN
John Lennon (far right) confirmed that the Beatles' 1965 hit song "Yesterday" came to bandmate Paul McCartney (far left) entirely in a dream.

"YESTERDAY"

THE BEATLES, 1965

Tracking the beginning of the end holds a strange fascination for Fab Four fans, and most would never point to 1964-65 as a pivotal period. After all, the Beatles had just conquered America, were actively touring and still wore matching suits on stage.

Nevertheless, almost everything about their '65 hit single "Yesterday" was unusual for the band—and by the end of the decade, some of those differences blossomed into discontent.

The song was written by Paul McCartney—coming to him in a dream. McCartney was the only Beatle to play or sing on the song (a first), and he was accompanied by a string quartet on the recommendation of producer George Martin. At first, McCartney rejected such a lush production because it wasn't very rock 'n' roll. He would later learn to embrace this kind of musical exploration, despite John Lennon wanting to record rockers till the very end.

"Yesterday" was also an early example of McCartney driving the rest of the lads mad over one of his songs. In this case, he couldn't stop playing the tune he dreamed up and asking everyone to tell him what it was. He was certain it was an old standard that crept into his head in the night. "Eventually it became like handing something in to the police," McCartney later said. "I thought that if no one claimed it after a few weeks then I would have it."

That wasn't the end of it. McCartney didn't know what to call the song, so he played it over and over hoping for inspiration.

"Paul wrote nearly all of it, but we just couldn't find the right title," writing partner Lennon later recalled. "Every time we got together to write songs or for a recording session, this would come up. We called it 'Scrambled Egg' and it became a joke between us. We almost had it finished when we made up our minds that only a one-word title would suit and, believe me, we just couldn't find the right one. Then, one morning, Paul woke up, and the song and the title were both there. Completed! I know it sounds like a fairy tale, but it is the plain truth."

“PURPLE HAZE”

THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE, 1967

When Jimi Hendrix first arrived in London with his new manager, ex-Animals bassist Chas Chandler, the virtuoso guitar-playing Voodoo Child was immediately treated like an oddity, a force to be feared and a messiah—all at the same time.

Back home in America, Hendrix was a former Army parachute jumper from Seattle who taught himself guitar and worked in backing bands for Little Richard and the Isley Brothers. But in the U.K., Hendrix and his music were a source of endless fascination. He was seen as a pioneer of psychedelic blues whose style was soon adopted by artists on both sides of the pond.

Before it became a trap, Hendrix enjoyed the attention, sometimes playing up his mysterious persona to optimal effect. Such may have been the case with “Purple Haze,” a song that Hendrix claimed came to him in a scary dream in which he found himself walking on the bottom of the ocean surrounded by a purple mist. This story may have been true, but what is certain is that Chas Chandler heard him practicing the iconic riff backstage at a London club and told him he should finish the song because it was a hit.

“Oh, ooh, you should hear the real ‘Purple Haze,’” Hendrix once said in an interview. “It has about 10 verses. But it goes into different changes.” Sadly, that version was lost to time and legend since Hendrix died of asphyxia after he aspirated on his own vomit while intoxicated on barbiturates in September 1970. He was 27 years old.

★

COSMIC NIGHTMARE
Jimi Hendrix (left), onstage with his band the Jimi Hendrix Experience in 1969, claimed “Purple Haze” was inspired by a scary dream.

NEW EXPERIENCE
English bassist Noel Redding (above) and drummer Mitch Mitchell (above, top) joined the newly formed Jimi Hendrix Experience in 1966.

CHAPTER 4

"A CHANGE IS GONNA COME"

SAM COOKE, 1964

The '60s were an era of social protest, but many topics were still not easy to discuss. One such subject was civil rights, which makes Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" a remarkable achievement.

Sam Cooke was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and raised in Chicago. A huge supporter of the civil rights movement, Cooke was friends with Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali. At the time, several of Cooke's allies were considered controversial to white America—but Sam Cooke was not.

After breaking out in 1957, Cooke enjoyed a string of hits including "You Send Me" and "Twistin' the Night Away." Clean cut, handsome and with a delivery that could alternate between soulful and smooth, Cooke delivered music that was enjoyed by both Black and white audiences with equal enthusiasm.

When Cooke heard Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," he was determined to write a protest song of his own that could command the public's attention.

Cooke lived with racism his entire life. Like so many people of his time, he was deeply moved by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s efforts for civil equality, including his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington in August 1963.

Just after Christmas '63, Cooke had a dream of his own—one that gave him the lyrics to "A Change Is Gonna Come."

Sadly, Cooke did not live to see the impact of his most important song. On Dec. 11, 1964—just 11 days before "A Change Is Gonna Come" was released as a single—Sam Cooke was shot and killed in Los Angeles. He was 33 years old.

A modest success upon its release, the song has since been recognized as an anthem. In 2007, the Library of Congress chose it as a song deemed "culturally, historically, or aesthetically important."

CHANGE AGENT
Sam Cooke (right and below) tragically died before "A Change Is Gonna Come" achieved success. Decades later, in 2007, the Library of Congress chose the song for preservation.

CROSSOVER SUCCESS
Cooke's ability to move from gospel to soul to pop brought him success with both white and Black listeners.

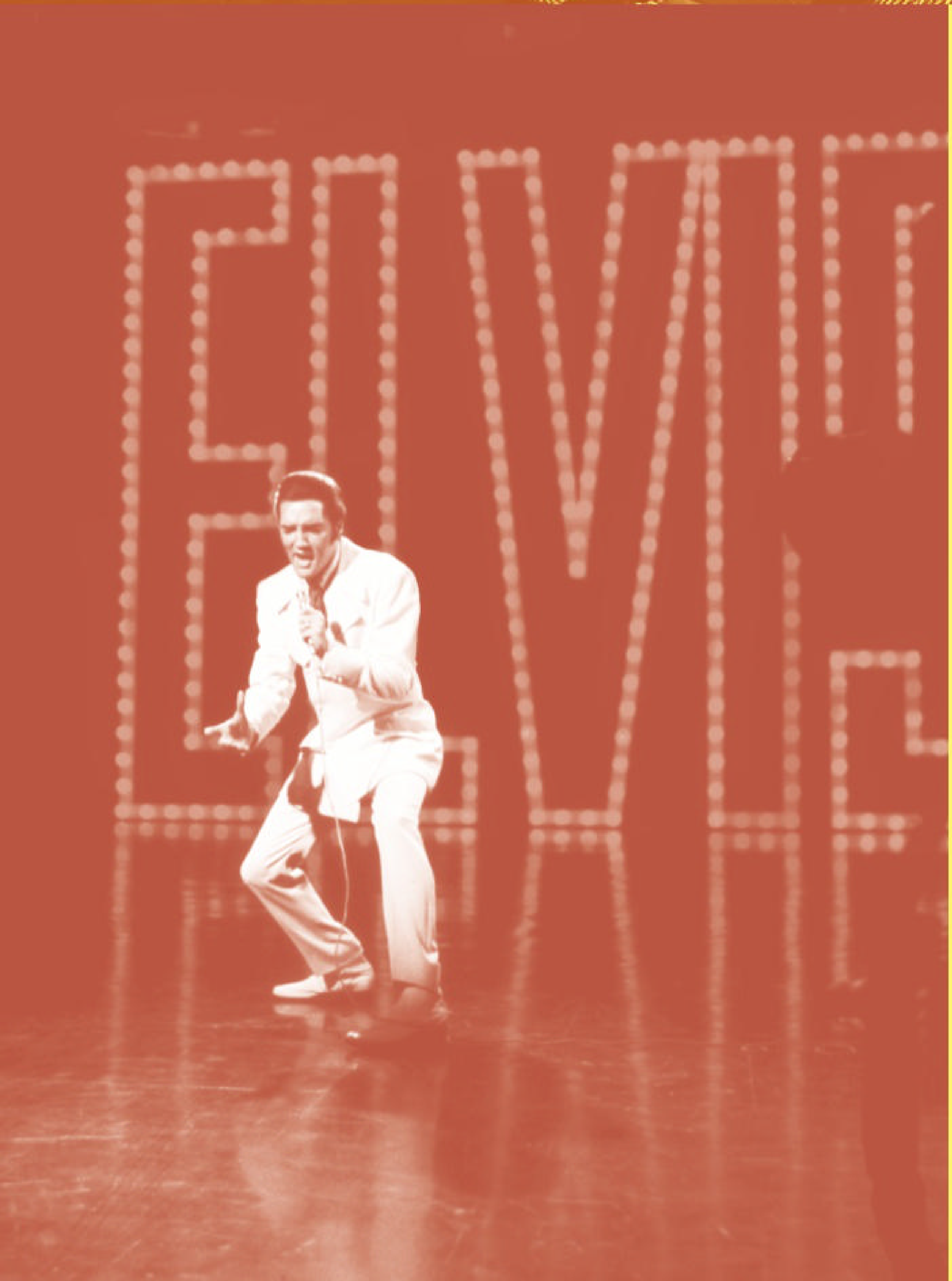
TYP

CHAPTER 5

BIG BREAKS

SOME VERY SUCCESSFUL FUTURE PERFORMERS STARTED OFF AS SONGWRITERS

For some, breaking into the music business meant giving away their songs with the hope that they'd become hits for more established artists.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* * *

“NEEDLES AND PINS”

THE SEARCHERS, 1964

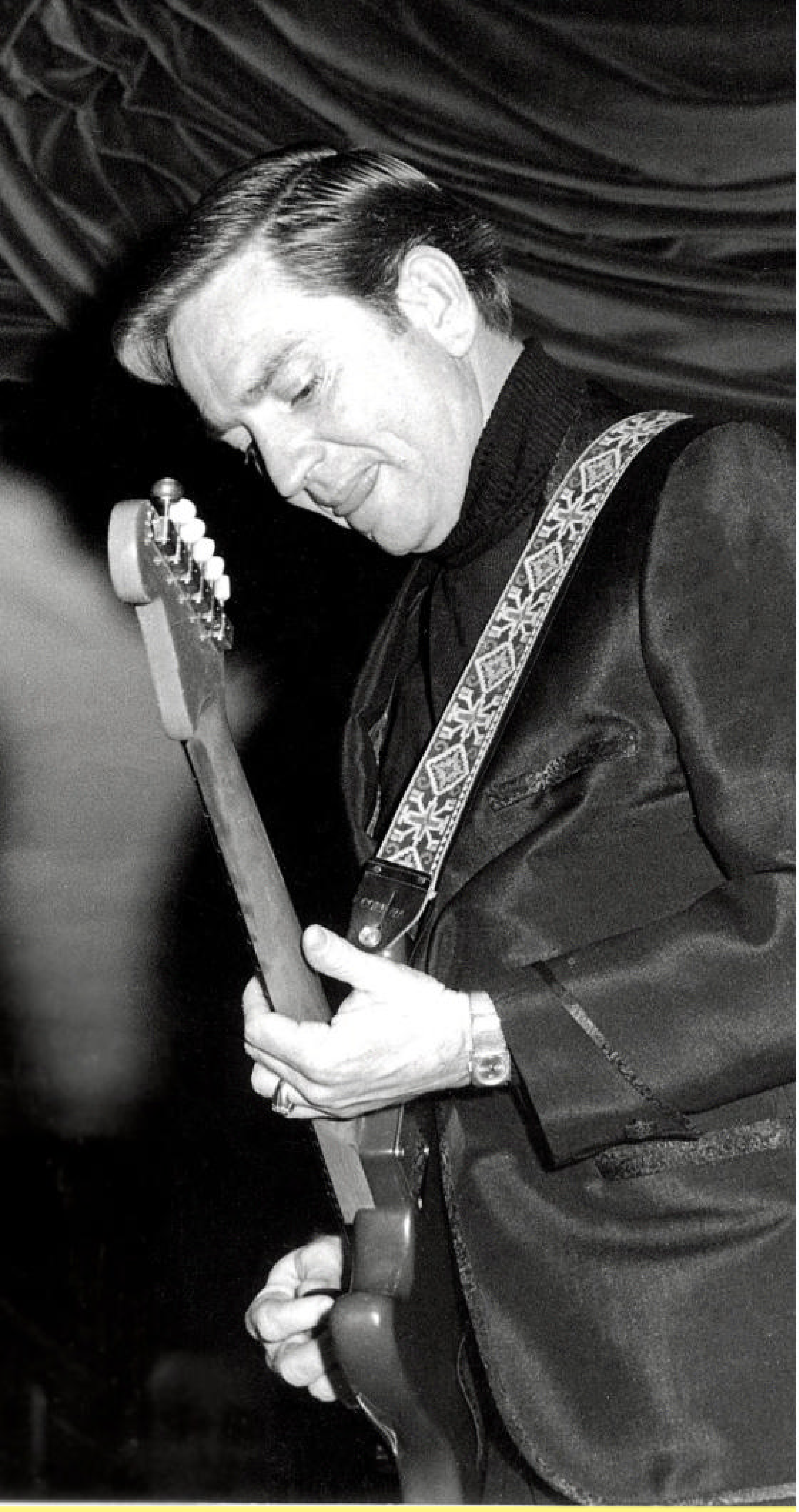
First recorded by Jackie DeShannon in 1963, “Needles and Pins” is best remembered for the hit version released by The Searchers a year later. That rendition peaked at No. 13 on the Billboard Hot 100, and was a chart topper in the U.K.

The song is credited to Jack Nitzsche and Sonny Bono, both of whom worked for Phil Spector, the boy wonder pop producer (and, later, convicted murderer). The song’s success helped pave the way for a very prosperous career for Bono—he became a successful performer with his wife, Cher, on records and television and eventually broke into politics, serving as the mayor of Palm Springs and a California congressman before his 1998 death at age 62 from injuries sustained during a skiing accident.

“Needles and Pins” was Bono’s biggest hit before writing and recording “I Got You Babe” with Cher in 1965—but it was not the first song he ever wrote that was recorded. That distinction belongs to a novelty number called “Koko Joe.” The song, about the “coolest monkey that you’ll ever know,” was written by Bono when he was still a 16-year-old student at Inglewood High School. It was covered by several performers, with the most well-known version coming from The Righteous Brothers.

BREAKOUT HIT
The Searchers (left) hit No. 13 in the U.S. and topped the charts in the U.K. with “Needles and Pins” in 1964.

FUTURE STARS
Sonny Bono (below, with Cher) wrote “Needles and Pins” with Jack Nitzche. The song has been covered by several artists including the Ramones and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.



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HIRED HAND
Prior to achieving his own success as a singer, Willie Nelson (above) played bass in backing bands in Nashville.

SIGNATURE STANDARD
Singer Patsy Cline (right) popularized Nelson's song "Crazy" after she recorded her own version in 1961.

CHAPTER 5

"CRAZY"

PATSY CLINE, 1961

Willie Nelson is one of the most iconic performers in music history, and one of the pioneers of Outlaw Country. But Nelson's success came on like a slow simmer more than a rapid boil. Before blowing up big in the '70s with albums such as *Shotgun Willie* (1973), *Red Headed Stranger* (1975) and *Stardust* (1978), Nelson held a variety of jobs in—and out—of the music industry. He played bass in backing bands, sold bibles, worked as a sales manager for Encyclopedia Americana and wrote songs for other artists.

In 1960, the 27-year-old Nelson moved to Nashville. "I enjoyed fooling around with the phrasing," he once explained, "but it made my sound noncommercial for all those Nashville ears who were listening for the same old stuff and misunderstood anything original."

Nelson's version of "Crazy" was a fine example. "I had problems immediately with my song 'Crazy' because it had four or five chords in it," he recalled. "Not that 'Crazy' is real complicated; it just wasn't your basic three-chord country hillbilly song."

Eventually, Patsy Cline agreed to record it, despite preferring another composition from Nelson more—"Funny How Time Slips Away." She wasn't offered that song because Billy Walker wanted to record it instead. Cline did not have an easy time with "Crazy" in the studio, mainly because she was on crutches and felt pain singing certain notes due to the lingering effects of a car accident two months prior. After working on the song for four hours, Cline took a much needed break. She returned to the studio three weeks later and nailed the released version in a single take.

Just a month later, Cline wrote to a friend: "They say 'Crazy' is a smash.... *Music Reporter* has it Top 30 C&W already & *Music Vender* has it already in pop & C&W charts. I'm real glad but can't hardly believe it's happening to me."

It was all happening for Cline, although her life was cut short by a plane crash in 1963. In 1962, Nelson released his own debut album, appropriately called ...*And Then I Wrote*, which included his version of "Crazy."

CHAPTER 5

"WILL YOU LOVE ME TOMORROW"

THE SHIRELLES, 1960

Before Carole King released one of the best-selling albums of all time—1971's *Tapestry*, for which she won four Grammy Awards and became the first woman to earn Song of the Year ("You've Got a Friend")—she was a songwriting prodigy in New York City.

From a distance, her life appeared to be a teenage dream. She jumped from Queens College to professional songwriter and occasional performer. At 17, she married her college boyfriend, Gerry Goffin, who also became her writing partner.

But up close, it wasn't all a fairy tale. King and Goffin married so young because King was pregnant. And even though they were "in the business," they weren't making enough money to survive on music alone. During the day, Goffin worked in a chemical lab and King was a secretary. Between the baby and financial concerns, Goffin felt a lot of pressure and anxiety. King did, too—but she maintained a positive outlook that everything was going to work out.

The big break came with "Will You Love Me Tomorrow," which was assigned to them by producer Don Kirshner simply as an opportunity to try to write a song for the Shirelles, a girl group from Passaic, New Jersey, that had just made waves with "Tonight's the Night."

Indirectly, but unmistakably, their song also tells the relatable story of young romance—and what might (or might not) happen if things go too far. It's not a direct answer song to "Tonight's the Night"—but it's close. Given the circumstances of King's teen pregnancy, it's easy to assume that she wrote the lyrics—but she did not. King wrote the music. And she did so first, leaving her work for Goffin on the piano for when he got home for work. Her attached note to her husband simply read: "Please write."

The Shirelles did not immediately like the song—but the song became a No. 1 hit on the Billboard Hot 100, making them the first all-Black girl group to top the charts. The song would go on to become iconic.

★

YOUNG LOVE
Carole King (right) and Gerry Goffin (far right) were college sweethearts who became a songwriting duo and then married in 1959.

BORROWED HIT
The Shirelles' (below) surprise hit "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" rocketed to No. 1 and was later released by King herself on her classic album *Tapestry* in 1971.

"A LITTLE LESS CONVERSATION"

ELVIS PRESLEY, 1968

Elvis movie musicals from the mid to late '60s rarely showcased great music—for every "Viva Las Vegas" there were five forgettable tracks like "Do the Clam." But one of the definite exceptions was "A Little Less Conversation," which came from the soundtrack of the movie *Live a Little, Love a Little*. With a fat, funky groove, unique drum fill and killer bass riff, the song cracked the Billboard Hot 100 (No. 69) upon its release as a single, and was remixed for the soundtrack of *Ocean's Eleven* in 2001. (The electronic remix went all the way to the top of the charts in the U.K. in 2002.)

With more than 500 million records sold worldwide, chart success was nothing new to Elvis—it was expected. But the same was not true for the song's co-writer, a young man from Buddy Holly's hometown of Lubbock, Texas, named Mac Davis.

Davis is credited with writing "A Little Less Conversation" with Billy Strange. In truth, the song was actually written by Davis—but Strange chose the music for the film, so his credit was a way of acknowledging (and compensating) Strange for his important role in plucking the song from obscurity.

Davis actually wrote the song with a different iconic artist in mind: Aretha Franklin. But his collaboration with Elvis yielded a group of memorable recordings, including "Memories" and "In the Ghetto."

In the 1970s, Davis would step into the spotlight himself with a No. 1 hit song ("Baby, Don't Get Hooked on Me"), his own TV variety show and a modest acting career (*North Dallas Forty*, *The Sting II*). Davis always remained fond of Elvis personally, and he was professionally grateful to him for giving his career a lift. As for the song, he wished he didn't make up the word "satisfactioning" to fit where he needed it. "It's not my proudest moment," Davis told *Songfacts*.

★

RERELEASED
Elvis Presley's (left) "A Little Less Conversation" was remixed and released 33 years later for the *Ocean's Eleven* soundtrack in 2001.

HIDDEN GEM
Texas songwriter Mac Davis' (below) "A Little Less Conversation" was plucked from obscurity when it was chosen for the soundtrack to the film *Live a Little, Love a Little* in 1968.

CHAPTER 6

THAT'S TOTALLY CLASSIC

THESE HITS TOOK ON A LIFE OF THEIR OWN

Some of our favorite hits from the '60s were directly inspired by other well-known tracks or were reimagined and became classics for other performers.

"THE TWIST"

CHUBBY CHECKER, 1960

In the '60s, it was still possible for a song to be a regional hit in one area of America and be almost unheard in other parts of the country. This usually happened when a local radio DJ took a liking to a song and played it so much that it became popular. It also meant that performers who were shrewd enough to spot a regional hit early could rush to the studio, record a version themselves and have a hit with the same song somewhere else.

Such was the case with "The Twist," a song about a dance whose origins have been traced to the West Indies. Singer Hank Ballard is credited with writing the song, and was responsible for the first released single in 1959, but the sound of his original version was R&B. And despite having the same lyrics that everyone knows by heart, it came off kind of dirty.

Meanwhile, the Twist dance was quickly gaining momentum. Not everyone looked great doing the Twist, but no one looked bad, either. It was the perfect dance to become a phenomenon, and it did.

In Baltimore, DJ Buddy Deane hosted a local TV dance party show where he played Ballard's version of "The Twist" and sensed a song with potential. He told another DJ turned TV dance party host in nearby Philadelphia named Dick Clark—who agreed, and thought the song might be even bigger if it was sung by someone more wholesome.

Dick Clark was already proving himself to be a young man with ambition. So, at Clark's urging, the local Philly record label Cameo-Parkway held auditions to find a singer who could cover "The Twist." This led to the discovery of Earnest Evans, a jovial young man known to make coworkers laugh at his impressions of Elvis and Fats Domino.

Plucked from obscurity, Evans quit his job and changed his name to Chubby Checker. Checker's version of "The Twist" rose to the top of the charts, propelled by his performance of the song on Clark's American Bandstand. Checker capitalized on the craze recording variations like "Slow Twistin'" and "Let's Twist Again."

★

TWIST AGAIN
Chubby Checker (left)—whose name was a play on "Fats Domino"—rose to the top of the charts with his 1960 version of "The Twist."

DANCE CRAZE
Hank Ballard (below) wrote and released his single "The Twist" in 1959 about a dance that was gaining momentum across the U.S.

CHAPTER 6

"GOOD VIBRATIONS"

THE BEACH BOYS, 1966

Brian Wilson, founder of The Beach Boys, is widely considered one of the most talented people of the rock era. Whenever Paul McCartney is asked to name who inspired and influenced him and the Beatles, he's always quick to pay respect to Wilson.

When Brian Wilson is asked what music most inspired him, he often talks about one song in particular: "Be My Baby," by the Ronettes. Wilson was 21 when it came out—already enjoying success with The Beach Boys—but the Phil Spector-produced song had a cosmic impact on him.

"I was driving and I had to pull over to the side of the road—it blew my mind," Wilson told *The New York Times* in 2013. "I started analyzing all the guitars, pianos, bass, drums and percussion... Once I got all those learned, I knew how to produce records."

Wilson put this education to use to produce "Good Vibrations," a song which featured many of the same studio musicians that worked with Phil Spector. Over the course of 17 recording sessions, which employed a dozen musicians and consumed 90 hours of studio time and 70 hours of tape for a reported cost of $50,000, which was then the most money ever spent to produce a song—"Good Vibrations" was born. The results are considered a milestone in modern pop.

"Good Vibrations" reached the top of the charts in both the U.S. and the U.K., but its influence was even greater. McCartney has stated that the song, and the Beach Boys album *Pet Sounds* that came out around the same time, sparked the competitive fire in the Beatles to up their game, which resulted in *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Wilson has called the song "the summation of my musical vision. A harmonic convergence of imagination and talent, production values and craft, songwriting and spirituality."

IN HARMONY
The Beach Boys (above) scored their third No. 1 hit in the U.S. and first U.K. chart-topper with the release of "Good Vibrations" in 1966.

THE VISIONARIES
Brian Wilson (right) was inspired by the Phil Spector-produced "Be My Baby," by the Ronettes, in 1963. The Beach Boys then inspired the Beatles to create *Sgt. Pepper* in 1967.

TRAILBLAZERS
Vivian Carter and Jimmy Bracken's (above) Vee-Jay record label released the Beatles' first U.S. singles in 1963.

BEATLEMANIA
The Beatles' (right) 1963 single "I Want to Hold Your Hand" hit No. 1 in America in 1964 and sold more than 12 million copies worldwide.

CHAPTER 6

"I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND"

THE BEATLES, 1963

Pop-culture history remembers the Beatles as "invading" America in one fell swoop.

But that's not exactly the way "Beatlemania" actually unfolded. In 1963, the Beatles were successfully storming their way through the U.K., their popularity growing exponentially every week in their home country. The four lads desperately wanted the frenzy to cross over to the U.S.—mainly because they all revered America as the birthplace of rock 'n' roll.

But major American record labels weren't interested in the Beatles. So in 1963, the first three Beatles singles to be released stateside—"Please Please Me," "From Me to You" and "She Loves You"—were offered by a tiny label called Vee-Jay.

Vee-Jay was owned and operated by Vivian Carter and Jimmy Bracken, a married Black couple in Chicago. That market had early exposure to the Beatles when local DJ Dick Biondi became the first person to spin a Beatles song ("Please Please Me") on American radio in February '63.

As American curiosity grew, Capitol finally stepped forward to claim the Beatles as their own—mounting a major publicity campaign around the group and the single "I Want to Hold Your Hand," which was released in the U.S. on Dec. 26, 1963.

The song was written by Paul McCartney and John Lennon in the basement of the family home of McCartney's girlfriend, Jane Asher. Peter Asher—Jane's brother, who later produced James Taylor and managed Linda Ronstadt—was at home when the song was completed.

"I went downstairs and sat on the sofa, and they sat side by side, on the piano bench," Asher recalled in a 2010 interview with Gibson.com. "They asked me what I thought. I said, 'I think it's very good.'"

On Feb. 1, 1964, "I Want to Hold Your Hand" hit No. 1 on the singles chart in America. It became the Beatles' bestselling single worldwide, selling more than 12 million copies.

“RESPECT”

ARETHA FRANKLIN, 1967

The song “Respect” is definitively associated with one artist: Aretha Franklin. Not only did her recording earn two Grammy Awards—Best R&B Recording and Best R&B Solo Vocal Performance, Female—it became an anthem for both Black Americans and women in general. On a personal level, it defined the often difficult road that Franklin needed to navigate on her way to becoming the Queen of Soul.

Rarely does one song summarize an iconic career quite so perfectly. Respect was even used as the name of the 2021 biopic starring Jennifer Hudson as Franklin.

But many might be surprised to know that Aretha Franklin was not the first singer to record “Respect.” The song was actually written and released in 1965 by another soul legend, Otis Redding. And while his version is not vastly different from a musical perspective, the entire reading of the song changes when sung by a man.

In the Redding version, respect is less literal and empowering and more a code for something else. Specifically, sex. Sung in a forceful, energetic style punctuated by blaring horns, Redding declares: “*What you want / Honey you got it / You can do me wrong honey / While I’m gone / All I’m asking is for a little respect when I come home.*”

Redding was very proud of the song. It was his second top 40 hit and he sang it during his famous live set at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967, six months before his death in a plane crash.

Franklin chose the song as one she wanted to record, changing the arrangement slightly and the meaning entirely. “It was the need of a nation,” she wrote in her 1999 autobiography, *Aretha: From These Roots*, “the need of the average man and woman in the street, the businessman, the mother, the fireman, the teacher—everyone wanted respect.”

Franklin’s rendition earned her that respect, especially from Redding himself. “Ain’t no longer my song,” he reportedly told Franklin’s producer, Jerry Wexler. “From now on, it belongs to her.”

RENEWED CLASSIC
“Respect” became one of Aretha Franklin’s (left) signature songs after she rearranged Otis Redding’s 1965 hit.

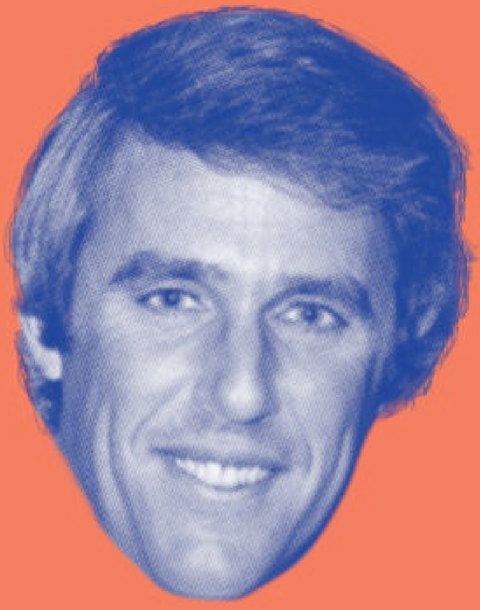
KING OF SOUL
Otis Redding (below) released “Respect,” his second top 40 hit, in 1965. He performed the song at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967, just six months before he died.

CHAPTER 7

NOT WHAT MOST PEOPLE THINK

THESE SONGS APPEAR TO BE ABOUT SOMETHING… BUT THEY'RE NOT

Song lyrics are open for interpretation, but some songs have deeper meanings than what you'd expect without further explanation.



CHAPTER 7

“BLACKBIRD”

THE BEATLES, 1968

NATURE WALK
The Beatles’ (from left) Ringo Starr, John Lennon, Paul McCartney and George Harrison go for a stroll in Paris in 1965.

POTENT PARTNERSHIP
Prolific songwriters John Lennon and Paul McCartney (left) penned some of the most memorable songs of the ’60s.

Did the Beatles enjoy nature? Sure they did. George Harrison was an avid gardener. John Lennon liked sailing. Paul McCartney owns a farm. And Ringo Starr...well, he was so taken by a Sardinian ship captain’s story of how octopuses build gardens out of stones that he wrote a whole song about it.

So it would make perfect sense that the acoustic “Blackbird” was simply about what it seems. There’s even the sound of a bird call overdubbed on the recording—and it really did come from a blackbird, the result of an Abbey Road engineer capturing it on tape and adding it to the studio’s library of effects, not necessarily for this song in particular, but just to have around.

However, when McCartney wrote “Blackbird,” which was credited to “Lennon-McCartney” as the songwriting duo agreed from the beginning of their partnership, he wasn’t inspired by birds at all. He wrote the song about tensions in the U.S.

As the story goes, McCartney was reading about race riots in the American South and he wanted to show his support. “I had in mind a Black woman,” he is quoted as saying in the Barry Miles book *Many Years From Now*. “Those were the days of the civil rights movement, which all of us cared passionately about, so this was really a song from me to a Black woman, experiencing these problems in the States: ‘Let me encourage you to keep trying, to keep your faith; there is hope.’”

The explanation is helped by an understanding of British slang in the ’60s, when it was common for young men to refer to young women as “birds.” In this regard, the song’s title is indeed literal, just not in the most obvious way.

CHAPTER 7

"I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER"

DIONNE WARWICK, 1967

Raised with music in her blood—her mother's family included the gospel group the Drinkard Sisters, her sister Dee Dee recorded "You're No Good" in 1963 before Linda Ronstadt, her aunt was soul singer Cissy Houston and her cousin was Cissy's daughter, Whitney—Dionne Warwick was discovered by the songwriting-producing team of Burt Bacharach and Hal David singing background vocals for the Drifters on "Mexican Divorce" in 1962.

Bacharach and David not only loved Warwick's voice, they thought she was the perfect performer to present the songs they were writing to the world. Their first collaboration was 1962's "Don't Make Me Over," with music by Bacharach and lyrics by David. The title came from Warwick herself, snapped at the duo in the studio while working together to find the right sound. The single gave the trio their first top 40 hit and Warwick her stage name, the result of her real last name "Warrick" being misspelled on the label.

This was followed by "Anyone Who Had a Heart" (a top 10 hit) and "Walk On By"—which sold a million copies and linked Warwick, Bacharach and David forever in pop history. And the hits kept on coming, all the way through to the end of the decade.

One of the most beloved singles from their prolific run was "I Say a Little Prayer," which picked up a new generation of fans when it was used during the restaurant singalong in Julia Roberts' 1997 movie *My Best Friend's Wedding*.

Most people think of the song as a sweet and innocent expression of love. And it is...but David also wrote the lyrics as a commentary on the Vietnam War.

"I believe Hal David was singing very, very seriously about our babies over there," Warwick said in an interview with *American Songwriter*. "And children—that's exactly what they were, 18, 19, 20 years old babies—were over there fighting the silly war. And it was a way of saying how much we missed them, how much we loved them, how much we prayed for them and wanted them to come on home."

★

WORKING TOGETHER
Burt Bacharach (above, top) and songwriting-producing partner Hal David (above) discovered Dionne Warwick in 1962.

CLASSIC SOUND
Dionne Warwick's "I Say a Little Prayer" rose to No. 4 on the Billboard Hot 100, becoming a million-selling hit record for Warwick (left) by 1968.

"COME TOGETHER"

THE BEATLES, 1969

John Lennon and Paul McCartney were one of the most prolific songwriting duos of the '60s. When measured by quality—or quantity—their catalog is virtually unrivaled. But the two men had very different work habits. McCartney toiled at his craft obsessively—George Harrison labeled him a workaholic. Lennon, on the other hand, didn't always have the same dedication and discipline.

As a result, some of the songs written mostly or entirely by Lennon were the result of him riffing liberally off an inspiration. "Good Morning, Good Morning" was his take on a TV commercial for Corn Flakes. Lennon admitted that the lyrics of "Being For the Benefit of Mr. Kite!" were a "straight lift" off an old poster that he bought at an antique shop.

In the case of "Come Together," Lennon was asked by American LSD proponent Timothy Leary to write a song for his bid to become governor of California. Leary's campaign slogan was "Come Together, Join the Party"—which Lennon was going to use in its entirety. But the whole plan fell apart when John couldn't get much further on the rest of the song. "I tried and I tried, but I couldn't come up with one," Lennon admitted in his famous 1980 interview with *Playboy*. "But I came up with this, 'Come Together,' which would've been no good to him—you couldn't have a campaign song like that, right?"

Built around Lennon's abstract word play, McCartney's distinctively swampy bass line and a passionate vocal performance, the song is, of course, a Beatles classic. It also landed John in legal trouble with Morris Levy, a notorious figure in the music industry who owned copyrights to thousands of classic rock songs. One of those songs was Chuck Berry's "You Can't Catch Me," which shared a guitar lick and the line "here comes old flat top" with "Come Together." Levy sued and Lennon eventually settled with him out of court after the Beatles broke up.

★

COME TOGETHER John Lennon (in fur coat) set out to write a song for Timothy Leary's bid to become California's governor. The result was an abstract song that became a Beatles classic.

SECOND TRY
Simon & Garfunkel's 1964 version of "The Sound of Silence" was remixed and released without their knowledge in 1965, where it shot to No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100.

"THE SOUND OF SILENCE"

SIMON & GARFUNKEL, 1964

First recorded as an acoustic folk song for Simon & Garfunkel's debut album, *Wednesday Morning, 3AM*, "The Sound of Silence" might well have ended up a record-bin obscurity after the LP sold so poorly that Paul and Art split up and decided to go about their lives alone.

But Columbia Records had a plan for salvaging value out of their investment. With the hybrid sound of "folk rock" on the rise, the label remixed "The Sound of Silence" to include electric instruments over the acoustic recording. Simon & Garfunkel didn't know this was happening, but when the new version hit No. 1 in America, they decided to reunite to capitalize on the opportunity.

Having written the song when he was very young, Paul never felt "The Sound of Silence" was as profound as some listeners gave it credit for. "It's a young lyric, but not bad for a 21-year-old," he revealed in an interview with Terry Gross of NPR. "It's not a sophisticated thought, but a thought that I gathered from some college reading material or something. It wasn't something that I was experiencing at some deep, profound level—nobody's listening to me, nobody's listening to anyone—it was a post-adolescent angst, but it had some level of truth to it and it resonated with millions of people. Largely because it had a simple and singable melody."

As for the song's striking opening line—"hello, darkness, my old friend"—that was inspired by something Paul had done since childhood: hang out in the bathroom because he could get a great echo off the tiles singing alone with the lights off.

CHAPTER 8

THAT'S DIFFERENT

GREAT HITS WITH UNUSUAL BACKSTORIES

Sometimes the story behind a song's creation is as entertaining and surprising as the song itself.

* * *

CHAPTER 8

"LOUIE LOUIE"

THE KINGSMEN, 1963

Written in 1955 by Richard Berry, and based on the tune of an Afro-Cuban song called "El Loco Cha Cha," the song "Louie Louie" became a standard for garage bands everywhere because it was easy to play and always pleased a crowd.

The band that made this ubiquitous staple forever their own was a Portland quintet called the Kingsmen. "Louie Louie" became a go-to number on their setlist after hearing a 1961 recording of the song by Rockin' Robin Roberts and the Wailers being played on the jukebox at a club in Seaside, Oregon.

In 1962, a local DJ named Ken Chase opened a local dance club and hired the Kingsmen to be the house band and convinced them that he should be their manager. On April 5, 1963, he shared the news that the band should report to Northwestern Inc. studios because he had booked a recording session.

The Kingsmen arrived at 10 a.m. on April 6, set up their instruments around three microphones and banged out two instrumentals ("Jamaica Farewell" and "Haunted Castle") and, of course, "Louie Louie."

But there were problems. First, the microphones were not well positioned for a vocal number, which meant lead singer Jack Ely had to sing up at a mike suspended from the ceiling. It didn't help that Ely also had braces on his teeth, and between his challenged diction and the microphone placement, it was impossible to understand the song's lyrics.

According to Dave Marsh's 1993 book, *Louie Louie*, drummer Lynn Easton clacked his sticks prompting him to yell "F**K!" which can be heard at the 0:54 mark. Ely started singing the last verse one bar too soon, realized his screwup and yelled something to his bandmates, then waited for them to catch up.

Everything about their version of "Louie Louie" became classic. It even prompted an FBI investigation when rumors started circulating that Jack Ely had slipped lewd lyrics about sex into a song played on the radio. There's simply no way to know what he's singing—it's all up to the ear (and mind) of the listener.

★

UBIQUITOUS HIT
"Louie Louie" became a staple for the Portland-based quintet The Kingsmen (below) in 1963.

FIRST VERSION
Richard Berry (right) wrote "Louie Louie" based off the Afro-Cuban hit "El Loco Cha Cha" in 1955.

HONDA
HOND

“CALIFORNIA GIRLS”

THE BEACH BOYS, 1965

What do you get when you combine a piano, cowboy-movie film scores from the ’50s, the genius of Beach Boys co-founder Brian Wilson, and the lingering effects of his first acid trip? The tune to “California Girls”!

Wilson has never shied away from openly discussing the ups and (many) downs of his life, as well as his use of drugs in the ’60s as a means to cope. His first experience with LSD eventually led him to a piano in his Hollywood apartment during a sleepless night when he was plagued by fear and anxiety. Sitting down to play, he found relief in a hypnotic riff.

“I was thinking about the music from cowboy movies,” he explained to the *Los Angeles Times* in 2007. “And I sat down and started playing it, bum-buhdeeda, bum-buhdeeda. I did that for about an hour. I got these chords going. Then I got this melody, it came pretty fast after that. And the rest was history, right?”

As for the lyrics, Wilson received help from his cousin—Beach Boys lead singer Mike Love. “He had the chorus, ‘I wish they all could be California Girls,’ but no other lyrics,” the frontman recalled in a 2013 interview with *Rock Cellar Magazine*. “So I went out in the hallway and came up with, ‘Well, East Coast girls are hip, I really dig the styles they wear, and Southern girls with the way they talk, knock me out when I’m down there’…I wrote this poem touching on four corners of the U.S. and then over to Hawaii and all around the world.”

Love added that the song’s intended message is often taken wrong. “Some people misunderstood the meaning of the song that we were saying California girls were the best.... What we were really saying if you listen or read the lyrics, we were appreciating the fact that even though we went all around the world we’d like to bring them all back to California with us.”

Is that reading better or worse? You can decide.

★

GROUP EFFORT
Written by Brian Wilson and Mike Love, the Beach Boys’ “California Girls” was one of the band’s (left) most successful songs worldwide, reaching No. 3 in the U.S.

CALIFORNIA TRIP
Brian Wilson (below) wrote the melody for the Beach Boys’ “California Girls” while recovering from LSD.

PSYCHEDELIC VIBES
The trippy lyrics of "Incense and Peppermints" was a surprise smash for the group that would come to be known as Strawberry Alarm Clock.

"INCENSE AND PEPPERMINTS"

STRAWBERRY ALARM CLOCK, 1967

Imagine having a No. 1 hit in the U.S. with lead vocals sung by a kid virtually off the street who isn't even in your band. This is what happened to the group behind "Incense and Peppermints."

Keyboard player Mark S. Weitz explained the whole messy affair in an interview with Songfacts.com. "I came up with the idea and actual music to the then-untitled song," said Weitz, who further worked to develop it with bandmate and guitarist Ed King, who contributed the bridge. "Our producer Frank Slay decided to send the fully mixed music track (recorded on eight tracks of mono!) to John Carter, a member of the band the Rainy Daze, who Slay also produced at the time. John Carter was solely responsible for conjuring up the lyrics and the controversial melody line extracted out of the finished musical track."

The members of the band, then known as Thee Sixpence, did not love this version of "their" song—especially the trippy lyrics. On the day the song was cut, they even asked their friend Greg Munford to sing the lead. Munford was 16-years-old and in the studio to sing background vocals.

When "Incense and Peppermints" was released as the B-side to a song they preferred, "The Birdman of Alkatrash," Thee Sixpence had a new identity: Strawberry Alarm Clock. "When I got home from the band meeting resulting in the name change, my mother simply said, 'You've got to be kidding,'" Ed King wrote in a post on his forum in 2009. (King would go on to become a longtime member of Lynyrd Skynyrd.)

L.A. radio DJs started playing the single on the air—on the B-side—which led to a comfy 16-week stay on the charts. The sad kicker was Weitz and King never received a songwriting credit, which meant they never earned any royalties for "Incense and Peppermints."

“WHITE RABBIT”

JEFFERSON AIRPLANE, 1967

Before becoming the iconic lead singer of Jefferson Airplane, Grace Slick spent a year in another psychedelic band called The Great Society with her first husband, drummer Jerry Slick. It was with this group that she wrote and first performed “White Rabbit,” her ode to the drug references she saw in children’s literature.

Specifically, Slick found inspiration in Lewis Carroll’s 1865 classic *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*—coupled with listening to the Miles Davis album *Sketches of Spain* for 24 hours straight while on an acid trip.

“In all those children’s stories, you take some kind of chemical and have a great adventure,” she later explained to writer Mark Paytress. “*Alice in Wonderland* is blatant. Eat me! She gets literally high, too big for the room. Drink me! The caterpillar is sitting on a psychedelic mushroom smoking opium!”

In The Great Society’s version of “White Rabbit,” the song is more an excuse for a jam. A live recording from this era runs 6:07, with about four minutes of instrumentation before Slick sings a word. When Slick joined Jefferson Airplane in 1966, she brought “Alice” with her...and her new band included a tighter, 2:29 rendition of “White Rabbit” on the LP *Surrealistic Pillow*. Also released as a single, the song peaked at No. 8 on the Billboard Hot 100.

It was one of the first mainstream radio hits to talk openly about drug use, although the outspoken Slick also wanted to make a very specific point about parental hypocrisy as well. “I don’t think most people realize the song was aimed at parents who drank and told their kids not to do drugs,” Slick said in an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “I felt they were full of crap. She also told *The Wall Street Journal*, “I sang the words slowly and precisely, so the people who needed to hear them wouldn’t miss the point. But they did.”

★

SURREAL LIFE
After joining Jefferson Airplane (above) in 1966, Slick and company included a new version of “White Rabbit” on their 1967 album, *Surrealistic Pillow*.

ASK ALICE
Grace Slick’s song “White Rabbit” was inspired by the drug references she saw in children’s literature such as *Alice in Wonderland* (left).

CHAPTER 9

DON'T BLOW YOUR COVER

SOMETIMES, A SONG GAINS NEW FAME THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Sometimes songs get the treatment they deserve and find a new audience thanks to a second chance with a new artist.

★ ★ ★

"TAINTED LOVE"

GLORIA JONES, 1964

Gloria Jones enjoyed a rich and varied career as a singer, songwriter and stage performer. She has written songs for Motown, was a member of the Los Angeles cast of the stage musical *Hair* and played keyboard for English glam rock band T. Rex (she and lead singer Marc Bolan also had a son together, Rolan).

Written by Ed Cobb, Jones' rendition of "Tainted Love" was paired with "My Bad Boy's Comin' Home" and released as a single in 1964. The record failed to chart in the U.S. or the U.K.—but it existed, waiting to be discovered.

In the early '70s, a club phenomenon emerged in England's Northern towns that reignited interest in the sounds of American soul records. The movement was called, appropriately, Northern Soul. This led British DJ Richard Searling to grab a copy of "Tainted Love" while visiting the States and play it at Va Va's in Bolton.

Eventually, it became a Northern Soul staple, so popular that Jones re-recorded her song in 1976 to try to capitalize. This is the version that eventually came to the attention of Marc Almond, singer for an English synth act called Soft Cell. With Jones' musical partner David Ball, Soft Cell began performing "Tainted Love" as part of their live set. The song was then optioned to be released as a "make or break" single, with the first take (one in which Almond sings with a sneer but slightly off key) used on the release.

The Soft Cell version of "Tainted Love"—which also features part of the Supremes' classic "Where Did Our Love Go?"—climbed all the way to No. 1 in the U.K., battling Human League's "Don't You Want Me" for best-selling song of 1981.

Who did "Tainted Love" better? Soft Cell producer Mike Thorne offered his biased opinion in a 1999 edition of *The Stereo Society*: "[Jones' 1976 version] was really so over-ramped and so frantic. It was good for the dance floor, but I didn't like the record... When Soft Cell performed the song I heard a very novel sound."

SECOND CHANCE
Soft Cell's (above) 1981 version of Ed Cobb's "Tainted Love" was a New Wave hit for the group in the early '80s.

SURPRISE RETURN
Gloria Jones' (above, top, with Marc Bolan, and left) "Tainted Love" failed to chart in 1964, but interest was reignited when clubs began playing the record in the early '70s.

Last Kiss
josie
J.FRANK WILSON
and the Cavaliers
ELL LAURA I LOVE HER
ONLY THE LONELY
HAT'LL BE THE DAY
OUNG LOVE
SCHOOL DAYS
OVER THE MOUNTAIN
SEA OF LOVE
KISS AND RUN
SPEAK TO ME

FIRST KISS
Wayne Cochran (right), best known for his outrageous white pompadour, released “Last Kiss” in 1961.

THIRD CHANCE
Seattle rock band Pearl Jam (above) performed Cochran’s song in concert in 1998 and released it as a single in 1999.

“LAST KISS”

J. FRANK WILSON AND THE CAVALIERS, 1964

Beginning in the late 1950s and bleeding into the early ’60s, an odd sub-genre emerged in pop music. Alternately called “teen tragedies,” “death discs” and “splatter platters,” these were hyperemotional songs about a young lover losing a boyfriend or girlfriend to the grim reaper—usually by way of a sudden auto accident.

The theme didn’t flourish on the fringe—these were mainstream hits, including “Leader of the Pack,” “Dead Man’s Curve,” “Tell Laura I Love Her” and “Teen Angel.”

Written by Wayne Cochran—a performer best remembered for his outrageously bouffant white pompadour—“Last Kiss”was first released in 1961 with Cochran singing. The single didn’t do well, so Cochran rerecorded it and tried again in 1963. No luck.

The song did take off in 1964 for J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers. Their version of “Last Kiss” climbed to No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100 and sold over a million copies. (Cochran also hoped the third time might be a charm for a re-re-release. But no.)

Of course, many music fans don’t associate “Last Kiss” with J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers, either. That’s because Pearl Jam covered the song in concert in 1998 and released it in 1999 with proceeds going to refugees of the Kosovo War.

As for Wayne Cochran, things turned out just fine. He never had a hit record, but he did enjoy a long performing career as “The White Knight of Soul” with his band the C.C. Riders, before becoming an evangelist minister in Miami. He died in 2017 at age 78.

CHAPTER 9

“SWEET CAROLINE”

NEIL DIAMOND, 1969

With more than 70 songs that reached the Billboard charts, Neil Diamond has enjoyed a long and successful career. But the release that he will likely be best remembered for—now and forever—is “Sweet Caroline.”

When the song was first released in 1969, it climbed to No. 4 on the Billboard Hot 100. Many fans asked if it was about Caroline Kennedy, oldest daughter of John F. Kennedy. The nation was still reeling from the president’s tragic assassination, and Diamond indulged fans for years by saying that she was an inspiration. He even sang it for her via satellite for her 50th birthday in 2007—even though she was only 11 when the song came out.

Then, in 2014, Diamond started to change his tune, saying the lyrics he wrote expressed his feelings for his second wife, Marcia. He used another name because “Marcia” didn’t have enough syllables.

But there’s another (two-syllable) name that Diamond would probably honor if he had to do it all again: Amy. That’s because in 1997, Amy Tobey was in charge of choosing the music during baseball games at Fenway Park. Legend has it that Tobey first played “Sweet Caroline” during a Red Sox game for a fellow employee who had just had a daughter named Caroline. The crowd enjoyed it, so the song continued to be played late in games when the Sox held a lead. By 2002, “Sweet Caroline” was played at every game in the middle of the eighth inning, regardless of the score.

Now it’s a stadium anthem in arenas around the world, with thousands chanting “SO GOOD! SO GOOD!”—even though that’s not technically part of the original recording.

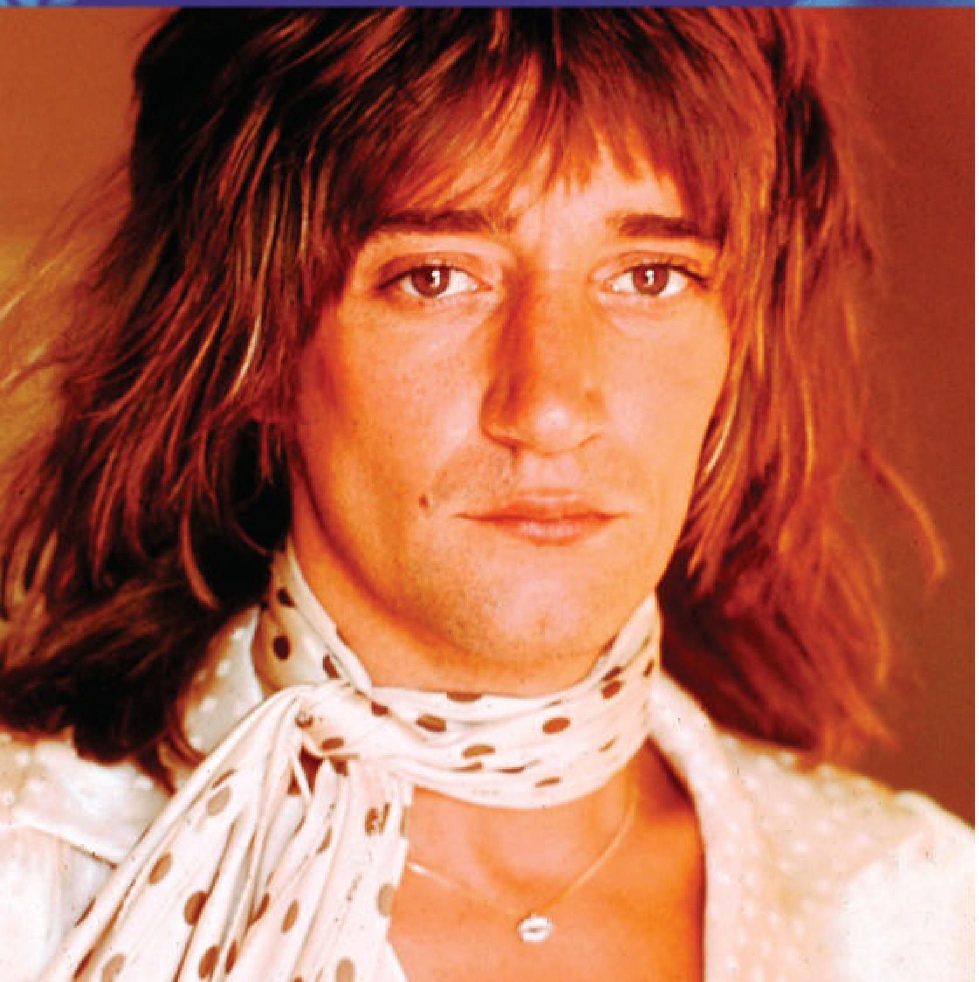
★

SWEET NEIL
Neil Diamond (above, in 1963, and right, with his second wife, Marcia, circa 1980) released “Sweet Caroline” in 1969.

CROWD PLEASER
Amy Tobey began playing “Sweet Caroline” during Boston Red Sox games at Fenway Park in 1997. Since 2002, the song has been played during every game.

THE FIRST CUT
P.P. Arnold's (right) release of Cat Stevens' (below) "The First Cut Is the Deepest" was a success in 1967.

NEW LIFE
Rod Stewart (below, bottom) reached No. 21 in the U.S. and No. 1 in the U.K. with his 1976 version of "First Cut."



"THE FIRST CUT IS THE DEEPEST"

P.P. ARNOLD, 1967

Written by Cat Stevens to reflect the pains of young love, "The First Cut Is the Deepest" was originally released by American soul singer P.P. Arnold, a former backup singer for Ike & Tina Turner.

Stevens' demo of "First Cut" was recorded in 1965, when he was trying to break through as a songwriter. He sold the song to Arnold for a reported £30, and her version—released in May 1967—reached No. 18 in the U.K. That December, Stevens also released the song himself on his album *New Masters*.

Arnold felt a personal connection to the song, having entered—and, eventually, left—an abusive marriage as a teenager. "It encapsulated everything that I was at the time," she later said. "Having the courage to get out of that and create a life for me and my kids. What a blessing."

The song clearly resonated with listeners as well, with cover versions charting in later years, including versions by Rod Stewart (1976, No. 21 in the U.S. and No. 1 in the U.K.) and Sheryl Crow (2003, No. 14 in the U.S. and No. 37 in the U.K.).

Rod Stewart's version is the most famous rendition, a fact Cat Stevens acknowledged when he said: "One song I do is 'The First Cut Is the Deepest.' I try to remind people I wrote that song, not Rod Stewart."

Stevens would go on to become one of the world's most successful performers in the '70s, before leaving the business in 1979 after devoting himself to his religious beliefs and changing his name to Yusuf Islam. In 2006, he returned to secular music with a newfound perspective on the past.

"It's been rejuvenating," he said in an interview with *Rolling Stone* in 2022. "It's great to go back into that time, that era, and listen again to what you did. It's slightly distant now.... So I admire it probably even more now, because of the distance. We were riding a wave, and it was beautiful."

THE STORIES BEHIND THE MUSIC
1960s
THE GREATEST HITS!

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MOTOWN SOUL
Clockwise from bottom left: David Ruffin, Melvin Franklin, Eddie Kendricks, Paul Williams and Otis Williams of ’60s soul group The Temptations.

THE STORIES BEHIND THE MUSIC 1960s THE GREATEST HITS

THE MUSIC OF THE 1960s IS THE SOUNDTRACK TO OUR LIVES. BUT CHERISHED RECORDINGS ONLY SCRATCH THE SURFACE. IN MANY INSTANCES, THE STORIES BEHIND THE MUSIC ARE JUST AS FASCINATING, FUNNY AND UNFORGETTABLE AS THE SONGS THEMSELVES.